

# GEORGE GILLESPIE

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GEORGE GILLESPIE was the son of John Gillespie, minister of Kirkcaldy. The father, according to Livingstone, was a "thundering preacher," but the lightning wit of the son was an inheritance from his maternal grandfather, Patrick Simpson, minister at Stirling from 1590 to 1618. Simpson was a great lover of Greek learning, as were not a few of the Scottish Reformers of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. An able classicist and the first early church historian of the Church of Scotland, his two short histories were re-published in 1624 as the *History of the Church since the Days of Our Lord*. In his later years he mastered Hebrew and took up Cosmography, showing all the versatility he transmitted to his grandson. Simpson's wit was quick and remarkably gracious for his age. Of a peace-loving disposition, though opposed to Episcopacy he sought no violent means for its overthrow. "It is enough," he wrote, "to have liberty to teach Christ's gospel and to die in God's peace and the King's." A moderate Evangelical of the finest stamp, he handed down the receptive mind, the talent of tongues and the quickness of wit to his grandson, but not the patient spirit that earnestly strove for peace. The violent and impulsive temperament of George Gillespie must have been the gift of his thundering father. As a child he gave no promise of that early brilliance that was to astonish Assemblies and Parliaments. He was accounted "dull and soft-like" by his mother, whose favourite was the younger and more specious Patrick. The father is reputed to have recognised the latent powers of the elder boy and to have prophesied a great future for him.

He lost his dullness quickly. Born on the 27th January, 1613, he graduated A.M. in St. Andrew's in 1629. In that year he received a bursary from the Presbytery to aid his upkeep at St. Andrew's.<sup>1</sup> The session of Kirkcaldy agreed to give "as much money for his entertainment as Dysart gives," which was 20 merks. He cannot have been anything but an exceptionally brilliant student, yet no regentship fell to him. The reasons are obvious. His extreme youth, for he was precocious in an age of precocious young men, prevented him from being placed in a position of authority. He was the grandson of Simpson, who courteously but firmly had nothing to do with Bishops. "They could not pervert me," the old man had said, "and I could not convert them." His father held similar views and probably expressed them less courteously, and George

<sup>1</sup> *The Presbyterie Booke of Kirkcaldie* (Ed. Wm. Stevenson, Kirkcaldy, 1900), p. 8.

Gillespie, more than father or grandfather, recked not what he said, how he said it, or about whom it was said. No teacher's pet or bishop's darling, he had to spend nine years in the wilderness before the Church, for great good and some ill, gave him a high seat in her councils.

The appointment as Presbytery Bursar in 1629 suggests that after his graduation as A.M. he remained to study Divinity. From May, 1630, until September, 1631, there are sundry references to him in the Kirkcaldy Presbytery records as the bursar of Theology. He thus intended entering the ministry from the very outset of his career. It would be unfair perhaps to accuse the Bishops altogether of deliberately keeping him out of the active ministry of the Church, as a lad of 18 or 19 years, however precocious, could hardly have exercised an active pastoral ministry with profit to himself and his hearers. Through Rutherford's influence he was appointed by Viscount Kenmuir, his domestic chaplain. Rutherford was a frequent visitor to the Kenmuir residences in Galloway and between the two men there grew up a life-long attachment. Gillespie was to pick Rutherford's brains on more than one occasion and present in brilliant debating form the thought and argument he gleaned from that even more copious and teeming mind. To be in Galloway with Samuel Rutherford was better than slumbering under Howie in St. Andrew's. Rutherford was Gillespie's post graduate University and he learned avidly from the master Presbyterian scholar of the age. He was happy in his duties in the Kenmuir household. Lord Kenmuir gave him a death-bed commendation which offers the reader of his *Dying Speeches* a hint that Gillespie was a little more outspoken than a chaplain to a great man was supposed to be. Kenmuir's death altered the domestic arrangements of his widow, and Gillespie moved to the household of the great Presbyterian noble of the South West, The Earl of Cassilis—grandson of the roaster of Commendators. There he remained as domestic chaplain and tutor to the heir, Lord Kennedy, till 1638. Cassilis was a man of some principle who neither truckled to the Kirk in her power nor forsook her ministers when later still she fell on evil days. At once a staunch Presbyterian and staunch Covenanter, he behaved kindly to the enthusiastic young zealot who came to him from Kenmuir. He was accustomed to write the sermon for Sunday and have his chaplain examine servants and children on it. Both lord and chaplain had a thirst for edification, and the canny Earl and the witty zealot must have enjoyed these early days before the Earl grew dour and the pastor sour.

While with Cassilis Gillespie made his first incursion into the field of political pamphleteering. In 1637 there appeared in Scotland *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*. For a time none guessed the

author and none suspected the young chaplain of Cassilis. The Book was printed in Holland, and it is not impossible that the noble pocket bore some of the cost ; all being part and parcel of the plan to destroy Episcopal supremacy. The first able literary attack on Charles' policy, the book was as sensational in the politics of 17th century Scotland as the letters of Junius were in the politics of 18th century London. It was almost as pungent. Too large to be called a pamphlet its object was to stir up opposition to the ceremonies and its art shows, with all its learning, the aggressive style of the pamphleteer. Gillespie is far more lucid and orderly in his presentation of the argument than Rutherford ; his learning, though not as encyclopaedic, is ample and abundant. He hits hard and goes on hitting with many a trenchant phrase and ironic gibe. In four sections he attacks the necessity, the expediency, the lawfulness and the indifferency of the ceremonies, and gave the first tilt to the mitre that " Jenny Geddes " was to shake and the Covenant tumble from the head of the bishops. The Council called in all copies of the work and ordered them to be burned by the hangman. Few were surrendered. The Book made Gillespie the penman of the Covenanters. Rutherford was to be their scholar, Henderson was to be their statesman, Gillespie their pamphleteer. When he read the Book, Robert Baillie could hardly believe it was written by so young a man. The *Dispute* was a little too strong for his stomach, and he wrote, " If that Book be truly of his making, I admire the man though I mislike much of his matter ; yea I think he may prove among the best wits of this isle."<sup>1</sup> Gillespie took a still further part in the Covenant pamphleteering. In the summer of 1638 there appeared a small pamphlet of two sheets, *Reasons for which the Service Book urged upon Scotland should be refused*. So able a pamphlet was it that Baillie took the writer to be Henderson, but he later discovered that the author was Gillespie.<sup>2</sup> These four pages are the most succinct and pithy presentation of the case against the Service Book that I know. In one phrase he damns all ceremonious liturgies. " It quenches the Holy Spirit because he gets no employment."

When the Covenant broke the power of the bishops one of the first acts of the Presbyterian party was to find a parish for the author of the work that had caused so great an uproar and broke the keys of St. Andrew's. The charge of Wemyss in Fife was in the hands of the Town Council of Edinburgh, and Gillespie, on the suit of the Earl of Wemyss, was presented to the charge on 5th January, 1638. The presentation and ordination was very carefully managed. The Archbishop ordered Robert Douglas to try Gillespie himself, but as Moderator of the Presbytery,

<sup>1</sup> R. Baillie, *Letters*, i, 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 90.



he ignored Spottiswood's request and took the matter to his court. On the 11th January the Presbytery appointed a day for the trial sermon, and the text, 2nd Thes. 11 and 13. On the 18th January he preached and was accepted by the brethren.<sup>1</sup> The month of February and the Covenant intervened. All the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy but three signed the Covenant. On Wednesday, 11th April, Wariston received a letter from Gillespie asking him to "clear the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy of their legal doubts anent the admission of ministers." The letter was obviously sent, for Gillespie was ordained by the Presbytery on 26th April. The ordination of Gillespie by the Presbytery on the very doorstep of St. Andrew's was a calculated act of defiance and practically the first patent act of disavowal of Episcopal ordination. Robert Kerr had been ordained colleague to his father at Prestonpans on 11th April by the Presbytery of Haddington, but this had not the same political significance as the ordination of an already notorious Covenanter against the will of the Archbishop. Ordination by Presbytery became the general rule and the November Assembly destroyed the other alternative altogether.

Little is known of Gillespie's work as a parish minister. He spent too little of his short life in a pastoral charge to gain any great skill in dealing with the sufferings and sorrows of ordinary folk, and we find him writing little about them. Though he was able to give all to a cause, and did give all, he was self-engrossed and somewhat egocentric in many ways—qualities even more obnoxious in his brother Patrick. Wemyss has no minutes now extant concerning Gillespie's ministry. The session records diligently kept by him are lost. Administratively, under Gillespie, Wemyss was a model parish. A Presbytery visitation in May, 1640, found ministers, elders and reader all without fault, a happy state of harmony existing among them.<sup>2</sup> The morals of Isobel Dick and Peter McKenzie gave recurrent trouble throughout his short ministry.<sup>3</sup> One poor woman, Janet Durie, was examined for witchcraft by the Session and Presbytery and finally sent for trial.<sup>4</sup> Few escaped condemnation even when the charge was ridiculously tenuous. A surly ruffian had killed the poor woman's pig and been told he would rue it. When he fell sick the usual accusation of witchcraft was brought against her. Fife, especially Burntisland and Dysart, has a bad reputation in witch burnings, and Gillespie seems as credulous as the rest of his age in this matter. For the rest he was diligent in his business. He had 63 elders and heritors in Wemyss. He was, I think, a presbytery man more than a parish man. Along with John Smith he examined Dr. Lamont of Markinch, one of the non-covenanting ministers, who was subsequently deposed.<sup>5</sup> He preached

<sup>1</sup> *Presbyterie Booke*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 141.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

at various Communion throughout the Presbytery. When not a Commissioner to the Assembly, he was usually sent as an assessor to the ministers that were. Towards the end of his Wemyss ministry, he was delegated to deal with the Privy Council on the matter of collections for the Irish refugees. These collections were handed into a central fund in Edinburgh, but Kirkcaldy Presbytery, through Gillespie, sought and obtained leave to retain some of the money collected for the use of refugees within their own bounds.<sup>1</sup> Like other parish ministers he was canonised when he departed, and Gillespie departed in a halo. His successor, Mr. Harry Wilkie, seems to have been irked by having the name of Gillespie always cast up at him. In 1657 Mr. Wilkie had been rather merry at his brother's wedding, but the Synod found him guiltless of any serious impropriety. He had a good fling at the Gillespies, Patrick especially, by saying that "at least he thanked God he was neither a complier with enemies nor yet a pluralist pensioner nor politician." A very palpable hit, for Patrick was all of them. In October Gillespie was presented to the parsonage of Methil by David Lord Elcho, which became part of the charge until Methil was constituted a *quoad sacra* in 1839.<sup>2</sup> At the Assembly of 1638 which overthrew the Episcopacy, Gillespie was one of the preachers; preaching on the text, "The King's heart is in the hand of the Lord," he went too far for the leaders of the party. "He did encroach too much on the King's actions" says Baillie.<sup>3</sup> Argyll and Henderson after the sermon advised the brethren to be careful in what they said about Authority. Gillespie had the kind of tongue that could win a case and lose a cause. When the Bishop's War threatened he was soon to the fore with another pamphlet on defensive war. This, if printed, is not now extant. It was so incautious that Henderson had to write another paper, *The Instructions*, to be read from the pulpits to counteract any ill effect that Gillespie's pamphlet might have in alienating moderate men from the party. Gillespie in fact was now the able back bencher who has to be taken into the Cabinet. His colleagues were never sure how to control him. Once set on, he was not so easily pulled off. He was as Baillie says, "too rash a youth in his determinations."<sup>4</sup> In April 1639 he is found with the Synod of Fife diligently establishing the Presbyterian regime within its bounds, the first meeting at which the bishop did not preside.

In 1641, Gillespie, at the age of 28 years, had become such a figure in the Church that he was chosen with Blair, Baillie and Henderson as an Ecclesiastical Commissioner in the matter of implementing the Treaty of Ripon. There was a certain purpose in the choice of these men, for

<sup>1</sup> *Presbyterie Booke*, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> R. Baillie, *Letters*, I, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 186.

Henderson had now set his mind on the creation of a Presbyterian Britain. Baillie writes "that it was thought meet that not only Mr. A. Henderson, but also Mr. R. Blair, Mr. George Gillespie and I should, all three, for diverse ends, go to London; Mr. Robert Blair to satisfy the minds of many in England who love the way of New England better than that of Presbyteries used in our Church; I for the convincing of that prevalent faction against which I have written; Mr. Gillespie for the crying down of the English sermons of which he has written."<sup>1</sup> When they arrived in London they assiduously applied themselves to the task of Presbyterian propaganda; too assiduously for either Parliament or King. Henderson fell foul of Charles with a little "quick paper" which he issued. Parliament, who were still toying with the idea of a primitive Episcopacy on Usher's model, gave the Scots the evasive answer that this matter of religious uniformity would be taken into consideration later. The Scots Commissioners were successful in establishing their own freedom and filling the Scottish Exchequer, and the visit made valuable contacts for a later day. The Scots ministers preached on Sunday and often on week-days in St. Antholine's Church to large congregations. They were heard as men who had won freedom and London at least became thoroughly acquainted with Presbyterian doctrine. Contacts were made with leading Puritan divines such as Twisse. Blair wrote an answer to Bishop Hall's *Remonstrance* which has been lost, if ever printed. Henderson wrote his *Government and Order of the Church of Scotland*, the most succinct setting forth of the Scottish system yet written. Gillespie wrote *The Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*, a lucid and orderly exposition and defence of the system outlined by Henderson. Baillie was busy also with the publication of *The Unlawfulness and Danger of Limited Episcopacy*. The Scots were determined that Episcopacy, limited or unlimited, must be torn out of the two Kingdoms. The first part of Gillespie's work is an exposition of the Scottish doctrine of the eldership, and begins with a strong repudiation of the term lay as applied to the elders and the word clergy as applied to the ministers. The second part is as able an exposition of the system of church courts. The four propagandists left the English Puritan with a good deal of material for thought. The Presbyterian ideal was for the first time being placed systematically before him. Hitherto English Presbyterianism, both actually and theoretically, had been formless and ill-defined.

Gillespie returned to Scotland with his reputation greatly enhanced. So much so that the Town Council of Aberdeen appointed him as one of their ministers without asking his consent. Doubtless Aberdeen deemed

<sup>1</sup> Baillie, *Letters*, I, p. 269.



that so young a man would be flattered by being presented to a charge in the leading city of the North East. Gillespie, who never placed a low value on himself, had other thoughts. The Assembly of 1641 refused to translate him, giving the reason that they wished to keep him near St. Andrew's. But Gillespie had his eyes on Edinburgh. Andrew Cant had also been appointed to Aberdeen and had written to Gillespie on the matter. Cant too would have liked Edinburgh, and in his correspondence with Aberdeen Council and with Gillespie is somewhat acidulous. But Gillespie would not be manoeuvred into going where he had no desire. Making Aberdeen's high-handed appointment of him without approach his excuse, he wrote with dry irony, " Besides if I must transport at all with you, I will hearken to any other sooner nor to Aberdeen. They are indeed in need of a better minister and you are worthy of a better colleague than I am ; but I wish both ye and they without more trouble set your mind upon another, for if I be not very very far mistaken ye will be disappointed of me." This modesty was no obstacle to his becoming minister of Greyfriar's, Edinburgh, the following year. Nor did it prevent him becoming engaged in an intrigue with his cousin by marriage, the notorious Will Murray, to have his brother Patrick installed as minister in Glasgow Cathedral. A minority of the Town Council supported Patrick's presentation, but the majority opposed on the grounds of his youthfulness. Gillespie, through Will Murray, had got the King, who had the patronage, to present Patrick to the Cathedral. Opposition in the Council and Presbytery was so strong that another was eventually appointed.<sup>2</sup> This same connection with the Murray family was to save Patrick's neck when James Guthrie, a finer man, was hanged. There was a good deal of the careerist in both Gillespies, and Baillie hints that when George was translated to Edinburgh in 1642, his apparent reluctance at the Assembly was histrionic if not indeed tendencious.<sup>3</sup> Balfour records that in September 1641, during Charles' last visit to Scotland, Gillespie, still minister at Wemyss, preached before him in the Abbey Church from the 5th Chapter of Corinthians. The text is not given—most likely verse 15, " Purge out the old leaven." He never held his hand whether the advantage was fair or unfair. In October 1641 Commissioners from the Presbytery at Edinburgh sought to have Gillespie translated to Greyfriars, but as the Synod of Fife had already consented to his translation to St. Andrew's, the matter was remitted to a Committee of Assembly meeting in November, and apparently by them to the Assembly which met in August 1642, and translated Gillespie to Greyfriars. He went, selling his manse to Mr. Harry Wilkie, his successor, for 500 merks. Greyfriars had little of him

<sup>1</sup> Spalding, *Memorials*, II, pp. 484-485.

<sup>2</sup> Baillie, *Letters*, II, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 47.

as a pastor and not much as a preacher for he was moved to the High Kirk on his return from London in 1647.

In the years between his ordination and his sojourn in England, from which he returned with an English accent, Gillespie identified himself with the ultra Puritan party in the Church during the "Novations" controversy. The extremists of the South West objected to the use of the Lord's Prayer and the Gloria Patria in public worship, also the minister bowing in the pulpit in private prayer before the Service. They also encouraged the use of the Conventicles or private meetings for private edification. The bulk of the Presbyterian party favoured the old usages also since the occasion for private meetings—among Presbyterians at least—had passed, and since these meetings sometimes deteriorated into a prayer slanging of an unliked minister, there was a general feeling that they should be discontinued. The controversy dragged on for about three years with Gillespie and Rutherford giving but indifferent support to the official party in the Church. The need of a united front to deal with the English Commissioners in 1642 helped in effecting a compromise settlement. Gillespie and Rutherford had an equal dread of schism and managed to control the zealots, but the agitation was such that the use of the Lord's Prayer in public worship gradually passed, for a time, out of the Church. In the negotiations preceding the Solemn League and Covenant, Gillespie played an active part, Henderson realising that this keen mind under guidance had valuable service to give to the Church. He was appointed in 1643 to the inner Committee of Moderators' Assessors, although not a Commissioner, because of Henderson's regard for him, and was one of those subsequently appointed to the Assembly Committee which helped to frame the Solemn League and Covenant. It was inevitable that he should be chosen as a Scottish Commissioner to Westminster.

At the Westminster Assembly, entrusted with the task of creating ecclesiastical standards for both nations, Gillespie made his most important contribution to Presbyterian history. The Scottish Commissioners, by insisting on being treated as National Commissioners, initiated propositions in Committee, debated them in Assembly, and still kept a revisory power in their hands by being Members of the Grand Committee of Parliament and Assembly which scanned the finished article before it ultimately was sent up to Parliament. Nevertheless every proposition had to pass before the keenest theological minds in England. In getting the standards shaped to the Scottish liking, the dominating factor was the keen debating power of Gillespie. Henderson's diplomacy and Rutherford's learning would have achieved far less but for Gillespie's debating acumen. The story of Westminster cannot be told in full here. One can only single out



the prominent occasions in which Gillespie figured and these centre round the debate on Elders and the Erastian controversy.

The first matter to employ the talents of the Scots was naturally Church Government and the form and nature of the Church to be established. They desired this to be Presbyterian. English Presbyterianism had been amorphous in form and loose in its ideas. The distinction between it and Congregationalism had not been clean cut, but, as Independency was hardening into a more rigorous congregational doctrine, the Scots in the Assembly now fought tooth and nail against the Independents for the rejection of congregationalism and succeeded in bringing the English Presbyterians and some Episcopalians round to their side. In some matters, however, such as the nature of the Elder's office, they were nearer to the Independents than to their other English allies. It was in the matter of ascending courts that they fell foul of the Independents. Many of the English divines were reluctant to admit ruling elders to a full power in ecclesiastical courts. Tirelessly Gillespie pursued the debate using the proof texts, *I. Timothy* v. 17, *Cor.* xii, 28, *Romans* xii, with great dialectic skill. In the first draft of the propositions concerning Church Government, adopted in 1645 by the whole Assembly, the compromise phrase, "other church governors," was used instead of "Elders," but in the final Form of Church Government the term Elders is also used. The Scots won their point in the end and a greater disciplinary power was vested in Kirk Sessions than the Englishman was keen to allow. They resented a "lay" element in an ecclesiastical court. Gillespie and Rutherford held that there was no such thing as a lay elder. Ordination had a less sacramental value to the Scots; it was a setting apart to office; elders and ministers were alike ordained servants of the Church, but ordained to different functions, one to preach and the other to rule. Gillespie's debating ability brought a good many of the Assembly into argument with the Scots theory. He next went into the attack on the system of Church Courts and extended himself in debate and pamphlet till the day was won in this matter also. He himself kept a journal of this debate, the most crucial of all for the Scots, and showed an amazing power of memorising all his opponent's argument and then rising to confute it trenchantly point by point. In 1645 he and Baillie had the happy task of bringing the result of their labours in the *Propositions of Church Government* and the *Directory of Public Worship* to the Scottish General Assembly in February, and having them passed, despite some opposition, by the Assembly. Gillespie drafted the Act which made them Law in the Church.

The Erastian Controversy began with the debate on the proposition, "Pastors and teachers have power to enquire and judge who are fit to

be admitted to the sacraments or kept from them, as also who are to be excommunicated or absolved from that censure." The opposition to the proposition was comprised of the Independents and a small band of scholars, chiefly Hebraists, who were genuinely opposed to excommunication. The Independents opposed, not because they rejected the doctrine (their practice in New England showed them to be more rigorous indeed than the most die-hard Presbyterian), but because they feared its use as a weapon in Presbyterian hands and because they were anxious to win Parliamentary support. Their doctrine of excommunication amounted to congregational ostracism. Selden, the lawyer, a political Erastian, sought to prove that excommunication needed the consent of the civil power and was answered by Gillespie in a speech that destroyed his argument, excited the admiration of the whole Assembly, and even dragged a wry acknowledgment of defeat from Selden himself. For months the excommunication debate carried on. Gillespie along with Rutherford argued very strongly for a more summary procedure in excommunication than most of their colleagues favoured. Only in February 3rd, 1645, was the *Directory for Excommunication* finished and sent to the Houses. It was never passed; instead an Ordinance was made cataloguing excommunicable sins; a further Ordinance enlarged the number of sins and appointed several commissioners in each shire to try the sinner before notifying him to the Eldership. To such a church policy the Scots were bitterly opposed. The Assembly petitioned against the Ordinance. Parliament sulkily voted the petition a breach of privilege and sent some of her members to give the Assembly a dressing down. They were heard with dignity and answered with firmness. A whole spate of literature burst forth asserting the Church's right to be master in her own house, but the high-light of the controversy was the Gillespie-Coleman controversy.

A little space may be spared to elucidate this *bete noire* of Presbyterians. George Gillespie gave the word Erastian its modern meaning. Erastus himself was chiefly concerned with the repudiation of excommunication as a disciplinary weapon of the Church. He was only secondarily concerned with the Magistrates' possible part in any such action. He was no Erastian as Prynne or Hobbes were Erastian. As was noticed, those who opposed Presbyterian excommunication at Westminster, the Independents for political reasons, the Hebraists for conscientious reasons, angled for Parliamentary support and got it to the extent that Parliament did intrude on the Assembly privilege of free debate and on the Church's claimed privilege of free discipline. Thus this matter of excommunication raised the whole matter of state control. The state held the Erastian

view-point on excommunication. It was just a step to call those who supported the state's claim to control all ordinances Erastian, and so the word got its new meaning. No man flung it more viciously at his opponents than Gillespie; no man seems to have used excommunication more viciously either, for in *Nihil Respondes* he boasted, "I dare say divers thousands have been kept off from the Sacrament in Scotland as unworthy to be admitted, where I myself have exercised my Ministry there have been some hundreds kept off, partly for ignorance and partly for scandal." Loving this weapon of authority, he was most bitter against those who denied it. John Coleman, a competent Hebraist, and a fussy little man with an eye on the main chance, had, in a sermon before Parliament, attacked the tenets of the Excommunicators. Gillespie preached a few days after before Parliament, made no reference in his sermon to Coleman, but when he published his sermon added *A brotherly examination of Mr. Coleman's late printed sermon*. Coleman's retort drew the caustic rejoinder from him, *Nihil Respondes or a Discovery of the extreme Unsatisfactoriness of Master John Coleman's piece* (1655). Coleman replied with *Male Dicis Maledicis* (1646), and Gillespie made a scathing finish with *Male Audis or an answer to Mr. Coleman his Male Dicis*. Coleman died and that particular branch of the controversy ended. He had been opposing Gillespie in the Assembly now debating the proposition in the Confession that "Jesus Christ as Head and King of his Church hath appointed a Government in the Church in the hands of Church Officers, distinct from Civil Government." Most vindictively in his preface to *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (1646) Gillespie writes of his death, "The Lord was pleased to remove him by death before he could do what he intended to do in this and other particulars." The Assembly generously followed a stout controversialist to his grave, but I do not think Gillespie went. The Coleman affair shows in Gillespie the note of personal bitterness, even of malice, towards those who differ from him or dare to answer him in his own coin, a note which from now is to sound too often in the voice of a truly able man. It can be attributed to some extent to failing health and to a weary brain taxed with Assembly debates and the writing of his last great work. Hussey, Coleman's friend, not unwarrantedly hit back at Gillespie's vanity and his cultivation of an English accent. *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (1646) was intended to be Gillespie's *magnum opus*. More expansive than his former works, it elaborates the whole Scottish case for excommunication in the historic justification. Book 1 deals with the Jewish Church Government and examines and confutes the case which Erastus made from it for excommunication by a *godly* magistrate. Book 2 tells of the origin and precepts of Erastianism and of the power and privilege of the magistrate in things and causes ecclesiasti-



cal. Book 3 is an exposition of the famous "Tell the Church" passage and sundry other arguments. The whole is an ordered and learned exposition of his case.

Here perhaps one may refer to Gillespie's other literary labours at Westminster. He was indubitably the Scottish Pamphleteer with a zest and ability for that somewhat dubious art. At least three anonymous pamphlets flew from his pen. The first was *A Late Dialogue betwixt a Civilian and a Divine* (1644)—a discussion of current affairs stating the ecclesiastical as opposed to the parliamentary point of view. Gillespie is in a mood, for him, of reasonableness. He even shows some understanding of the English as opposed to the Scottish way of change. The English Civilian says, "Sudden courses I doubt shall not so much glad us in the beginning as grieve us in the end." The Scottish retort is that if change is needed, it may as well come "suin as syne." The war halts because England halts "betwixt two or rather many opinions." There is some clever twisting of Selden's tail and the Civilian is left unconvinced but meditative. His next essay at anonymous pamphleteering was an attack on John Goodwin's *Theomachia* (1644), a tract defending the Independent position with the robust vigour characteristic of the Ishmail of Coleman Street. Gillespie was not far behind with *Faces About or A Recrimination charged upon Mr. John Goodwin in the point of Fighting against God and opposing the Way of Christ*. Recrimination it is, and Gillespie views with consternation the rise of religious toleration and commends Goodwin to Parliament's care as a mischief maker in no unsparing terms. In *Innocency's Triumph* Goodwin handled Gillespie as roughly: "As for that empty pamphlet called *Faces About*, the author of it, whatever face or faces he had (for it may be he carries one in a hood), it seems he dare show none." In fairness to Gillespie it can be said that policy rather than poltroonery dictated the anonymity of his tracts for he had an abundance of personal courage. He delved further into the toleration controversy with his next pamphlet, *Wholesome Severity reconciled with Christian Liberty or the True Resolution of a Present Controversy concerning Liberty of Conscience*. The work is the usual vituperative pamphlet, but this controversy was largely left in the hands of Baillie and Rutherford who wrote major works on the subject. The game of both sides, Independent and Presbyterian, was to make the other as obnoxious to the state as possible, and the spread of a weird sectarianism gave the Scots the opportunity to damn Independency as anti-social and anarchistic. Gillespie said quite a lot on these lines in his two pamphlets on the subject.

Two other works were written while he was at Westminster, *The*

*Miscellany Questions* and the *CXI Propositions*, concerning the ministry and government of the Church. The treatise, *The Miscellany Questions*, published posthumously in 1649, is a collection of notes made by Gillespie on all the questions that arose during his stay at Westminster, perhaps made before going in or after coming out of debate. They had been finally polished by Gillespie himself with a view to publishing, but, death intervening, they were published by his brother Patrick. They could be best described as a series of ecclesiastical notes by an Assembly debator, most useful for those who wanted to get the meat of the question without reading Rutherford. *The CXI Propositions* were an evil gift. In them he sets out all the ins and outs of the doctrine of excommunication. He brought them to Scotland and presented them to the 1647 Assembly, had them approved in principle and sent down to Presbyteries and Universities for consideration. This doctrine and its more baleful practice was to play havoc in the Church all through the next decade.

Gillespie at Westminster made an individual contribution to the shaping of the Church of Scotland, apart from the fact that from the sheer brilliance of his debating power, he time and again swung the Assembly round to the Scottish point of view. When he is not ultra-controversial, any emendations he suggests make for clarity and elucidation. Among everything else he, along with Rutherford, gave the present doctrine of the eldership to the Scottish Church. Through his efforts the place of the Kirk Session as an integral court of the Church was finally established. The Scots at Westminster could not have done without him. Baillie's letters are filled with admiration for Mr. George, "that noble youth." He wrote: "Of a truth there is no man whose parts in a public dispute I so admire. He has studied so accurately all the points that ever yet came to our Assembly. He has gotten so ready, so assured, so solid a way of public debating, that however there be in the Assembly diverse very excellent men yet in my poor judgement there is not one speaks more rationally and to the point than that brave youth had done ever, so that his absence would be prejudicial to our whole cause and unpleasant to all that wishes it well."<sup>1</sup> Gillespie's report to the General Assembly in 1647 is the best succinct account of the work at Westminster given by a contemporary divine, or by any other. He was not a theologian. The story that, in prayer, he conceived the answer to the question, "What is God?" has been discredited, as Gillespie had left for Scotland before the matter came up in Assembly. He saved Patrick's life in London, for, by using considerable influence to save Will Murray's life—who had been caught—from being hanged as a spy, he preserved him to save

<sup>1</sup> Baillie, *Letters*, II, p. 159.

Patrick from being hanged as a traitor. In 1645, in his journey north, he sought to preach the Scottish Army out of a mutiny at Newcastle, and a few months later he was again sent on a mission to withdraw that Army from Carlisle to Yorkshire.

Gillespie returned for the Assembly of 1647. Rutherford was in London, Henderson was dead, and he forthwith leapt into prominence as the nation's leading divine. Douglas was Moderator, but Gillespie was leading spirit. He steered the *Confession of Faith* through the Assembly. He composed a letter to the English Presbyterians exhorting them to be steadfast in their opposition to anti-Covenanting sectaries. He drew up the final Act which settled the old private meetings controversy. With Baillie he introduced the *Psalms* which were to be revised and authorised by a later Assembly. He maintained the power of Kirk Sessions in the teeth of Calderwood's opposition. He had all the documents and productions of the Westminster Assembly printed and published. He presented a gist of his *CXI Propositions on Church Government* to the Assembly and had them sent down, as noted, to Presbyteries and Assemblies. He was the 1647 Assembly. An act of Assembly inserted Gillespie's explicatory clause to Chapter 32 of the *Confession*. The power of Kings to convene Synods *pro re nata* for advice was allowed, but the intrinsic freedom of all ecclesiastical Assemblies resolutely asserted once and for all as the law of the Scottish Kirk. The passing of the *Confession of Faith* was his last great moment in a united Church.

The captive Charles was as great a problem to his keepers as his grandmother had been. The numerous intrigues in which he engaged cannot be recorded here, only the tentacle that reached out to embroil Scotland in the inky welter of the Engagement. The Feudal party in Scotland were weary of ecclesiastical supremacy; there was in some quarters a reaction among moderate Covenanters to the policy which had delivered a native prince to another power. These and other circumstances gave rise to the "Engagement," a secret treaty between Charles on the one hand and the Earls of Lauderdale, Lanark and Loudon for the Scottish Estates. In return for the support of the Scottish Army, Charles agreed when restored to establish Presbyterianism and try it out for three years in England. When the treaty makers returned in 1648 to report to the Estates the storm broke. Argyll, Gillespie and Wariston who had had dealings with Charles before knew how little he was to be trusted. Much as they disliked the Cromwellian regime they were still in treaty with the English Parliament even though it was the Army's tool. The Church, a minority of the Estates and the bulk of the people were against any more adventures. The Commission of the Assembly



moved into the attack asking information from the trio the moment they arrived home. A Declaration of the Engagement was presented to Parliament which drew much dry sarcasm. After protracted negotiations between Church and Parliament the latter, on 21st April, published a Declaration stating they intended to take what action they pleased in regard to the Engagement. The Church's retort was *The Humble Representation of the Commission of the General Assembly to the Honourable Estates of Parliament*. It was, being Gillespie's, anything but humble and attacked the Engagers with a mordant and sarcastic irony, but we miss now the precision and clarity of his earlier works. The Declaration and Representation were read in all Churches throughout the land. The Estates' only retort, so weak was their power, was to send a letter to the Presbyteries asserting their superiority in matters political. The Church answered with the *Humble Vindication* claiming that as Parliament was disobeying the voice of God, the Church and Nation could disobey the voice of Parliament. Thus the affair dragged on till the Assembly of 1648. Gillespie was by now a dying man—others had been appointed to preach for him. He had been translated to the High Kirk on September 22, 1647, the acknowledged place of an acknowledged leader. But the clear, precise, somewhat affected voice that had dominated Westminster was not strong enough for the rude atmosphere of the High Kirk with its congregation of hot-tempered barons, douce burghers and turbulent populace. Nevertheless, he was chosen Moderator in 1648. Baillie tells us he made a poor one.<sup>1</sup> He was ill and irritable. His keen debating mind caused him to enter into wordy contests with any members of the Assembly who differed from him and he was imperious to the point of bullying. Seldom able to moderate his own actions he was quite unable to moderate those of others. Argyll, Wariston, and many Presbyterian leaders were absent. Many were playing safe. Gillespie courageously held the Kirk in her course of opposition to the Engagement when even his allies were failing him. But prolixity and irritation were common in the Assembly. Long drawn out Declarations against the Engagement show how Gillespie's mental powers are flagging. The *Shorter* and *Larger Catechisms* were approved, but the *Directory for Church Government* was attacked by Calderwood because of the Kirk Session propositions and its examination with Gillespie's *CXI Propositions* remitted to the next Assembly. The *Psalms* were sent down to the Presbyteries for revision and report. The captious atmosphere delayed the passing of the last of the Westminster standards for not unnaturally the Assembly took its temper from its moderator. Baillie's description of the Assembly is dispirited and sombre. He feared that new grounds of division were about

<sup>1</sup> Baillie, *Letters*, III, pp. 53, 55, 62, 64, etc.

to arise. He was right. Gillespie did not live to see these new contentions, for his health getting steadily worse, and he retired to Kirkcaldy in the hope that his native air might restore his strength. He died there on December 17th at the early age of 35 years. By then the Engagers Army had been beaten at Preston. His last work was a short testimony dictated two days before his death in which he counselled the purging practice so disastrously put into effect by his party a month later in the Act of Classes. This was posthumously published along with a letter to the Commissioners of Assembly on September 8th and a short treatise comprised of sermon extracts called *A Useful Case of Conscience Discussed and Resolved concerning Associations and Confederacy with Idolators*.

Gillespie wrecked the Engagement. If the Kirk could have been reasonably sure of Charles' promises being kept, disillusioned as her leaders were with the Cromwellian regime, they might have entered the battle on the Engagers' side on the grounds that the Rump had broken the Solemn League and Covenant. At one point in the negotiations between representatives of the Church and State, Lanark had well nigh won the Church round when Gillespie entered into the debate and turned the tide against him. Led by him the Church encouraged the boycott of supplies, discountenanced enlistment and deprived them of David Leslie as a general. Ill-led, ill-fed and semi-conscript, the army's fate at Preston was a foregone conclusion. Lanark blamed Gillespie most of all for the fiasco. Yet Gillespie did what Henderson would have done. The people were war-weary, the land had suffered from Montrose's campaigns, Charles' word was utterly false and the Kirk knew it. To keep united and wait was the only practical course. So far he showed clear judgment and wise leadership. but he had not Henderson's gift of soothing hurt feelings and smoothing ugly disputes. Breaches between former allies were needlessly widened by his bitter tongue and even his friends could sometimes ill abide it. Never could it be said more truly that the evil men do lives after them. With his dying breath in that last publication he had ordered his Church to purge herself. His arrogant soul seems to have had a perverted delight in excommunication as a weapon of discipline. Desperately the Church carried out his dying orders. Engagers were excommunicated ecclesiastically, worse still, the Act of Classes was a political excommunication, and the strife engendered by this Act was to split the Kirk. Henderson led her out of bondage, the dying Gillespie led her into the wilderness.

Such was the career of Mr. George Gillespie. He was the least lovable of the great quartet at Westminster. He was ambitious, vain and sly in ways unknown to Henderson and Rutherford. Clever and capable, he

attracted attention and liked to attract it. "No man was wont to find a greater attention and audience," says Baillie.<sup>1</sup> A triumph for a Scot at Westminster! The bitter tongue of his later years was due partly to failing health, partly to the super-sensitive temperament that goes with clever, vain people, and partly to the impatience with the intellectually inferior in whatever arena he might be confronted by them. Yet in his hey-day at Westminster his contemporaries smiled quietly as he preened himself and delighted in his success. He was a man all through and died fighting; he was upright in all his political conduct; he forsook no cause he sponsored. He gave of the uttermost he had, even to his life in the cause he served; if he never spared any one, least of all did he spare himself. If the standards of government and worship ultimately framed at Westminster are predominantly Scottish in character, they owe that character to this young man who could so ably debate them through an Assembly of the age's most brilliant theological pundits. Twisse, Goodwin, Arrowsmith, Calamy, Marshall, Vines, Seaman, Burgess and Hearle were not men to be readily browbeaten or easily convinced. His particular gift to us is, I think, the formulation of the Scottish doctrine of the Eldership and its powers. His fatal gift was the emphatic prominence he gave to the doctrine and practice of excommunication. He was a young man in his power, with the pride, the intolerance, the rashness, the courage, the unsparingness, the eagerness of youth. Baillie's is no bad epitaph: "Certainly he was as able a man as our Kirk had; of a clear judgment, that which some misliked in him, would easily have been bettered by experience and years."<sup>2</sup> His brother Patrick gained both and died with his armour tarnished. George Gillespie died with his sword drawn and his armour bright.

<sup>1</sup> Baillie, *Letters*, III, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 68.



